

When the Armor Falls

by Athenal3

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'God, I need him tonight," she thought to herself as she tossed her now decimated suit to the motel room floor. She stood naked and bare in the darkness of the room. Naked from the lack of clothes. Bare from the lack of armor. Tonight, for the first time since so many years ago in Minnesota, it was all gone.

She padded lethargically to the bathroom and wondered how she had held onto her dignity on the drive back to the motel. It was the years of experience she decided as she turned the bathtub on the rummaged for her scented bath foam. Back in Donnie Pfaster's mother's house she had been at her literal wit's end. Now, years later, she knew how to make the fake expression of impassivity last a bit longer. 'Right up to now,' she thought as she felt the first of what she expected to be many tears slide down her cheeks. She didn't even bother to wipe them away.

She grabbed the extra towels she had requested at check in and put them near the tub and turned to grab her small travel radio. She flipped it to a rock station. She didn't think that even Mozart could calm her tonight. Then she slipped under the hot bubbles and let the sobs come.

This time, it hadn't been her who had been taken or overpowered, tonight it had been her partner. She remembered all too clearly when she found their suspect with a gun to her partner's head. He had been barely cognizant and she had been truly fearful that he'd sustained a concussion. Of course, that fear was secondary to the thought that with just one twitch his life might be ended, right there in front of

her. It had taken all of her willpower and training not to charge them and murder the bastard right then, but she knew she had to keep her wits about her and talk him down.

The killer had nothing to lose. He was sure to face the death penalty, or an accidental shooting by the local police, if he was caught. So why the hell not take the famous profiler who had identified him to the great beyond? Mulder was the psychologist, but was in no state to do the task. So Mulder's life lay in her hands. And if she failed all three of them were going to die that abandoned pier.

Even now she wasn't sure how she did it, but somehow she managed to trick him. To get him to pull the gun away just enough that she could be sure that he wouldn't shoot Mulder in reflex when she shot him. It was a good thing she was a crackshot because that's just what she did. Right between the eyes, luckily Mulder had passed out and slid to the floor just as she shot. He missed getting the more gory stuff on his hair. He also missed seeing it. But she didn't. She could still see it.

She picked up a washcloth and began to scrub her hands. The cursory wash she had given them in the police station hadn't been complete and there was still dried blood and brains under her nails from when she had examined the body and escorted Mulder to the waiting ambulance. Like a good boy he had even consented to go to the hospital to be checked out. Luckily he hadn't sustained a concussion, but he had still refused to remain in the hospital for observation. A police officer had driven him to the police station where she was giving her statement.

On second thought, maybe it wasn't they years. Maybe it was sheer numbness from the fact that she had taken a human life and had almost watched her partner die. The idea still left her breathless. Mulder just gone. It was unthinkable. She had lived through the idea once and that was more than enough for her. This time there would be no hope, she would have watched it happen. She would have been responsible. The fact that she hadn't failed was of little consolation right now.

The bath water began to cool and goose pimples began to spread across her body signaling that it was time to get out and face the world again. Or at least check on her partner and lapse into a fitful sleep. She washed her hair under the faucet and got out of the tub. Wrapped under the armor of towels she walked back into the dark room to dress.

She gave her hair a last swipe with the towel, not bothering at this late hour to blow dry it, and headed for the connecting door to her partner's room.

With the headache he already had and the pain killers the hospital gave him he should have been long asleep. But being Mulder he had refused to take the pills and refused to sleep before he saw her again that night. When she entered he was laying on the bed flipping the television channels. He was obviously in no shape to watch the glowing box, but was obviously comforted by the familiar sounds.

"Scully," he said quietly as she stood by his bedside.

"Do I need to ask how your head is?" she smiled softly at his predictability.

"There's no Spice on this cable," he whined.

"As if you could see it right now," she rolled her eyes.

"Sit," he patted the bed next to him.

Scully was startled, this was not standard. Normally she would stand by his bed and tell him he should sleep. He would whine and before the last syllable was out of his mouth he would be asleep. She would cover him, turn off the television and return to her own room. But tonight her armor was gone and so, apparently, was his. Tonight they had both faced a surprising end to their partnership. It wasn't a conspiracy or some paranormal-like cult. It was a simple maniac with a gun, although they'd had too many of those in their past too.

She pushed those thoughts away and climbed onto the bed with him. Mulder placed an extra pillow against the headboard next to him, a silent invitation. One which she implicitly accepted as she propped herself up next to him.

They sit there silently for a few minutes as he continues to flip through the channels. Even though it usually annoys her she can't bring herself to care. Somehow she is finding comfort in the senseless action just as he is.

"How is your head?" she finally dares to break the silence.

Mulder chuckles at the question. There he is laying, well, sitting, in bed with her and she's basically asking him if he has a headache. Well, stranger things have happened to them. "How about yours?" he asks.

"Not so good," she finally answers. Finally tonight and finally after six and a half years. Finally she is being honest with him.

Mulder turns and looks at her. He senses that the armor is down tonight. She is finally sharing a piece of herself with him. Finally giving him something more than "I'm fine Mulder."

'It's about time,' the psychologist and the man in him concur. He reaches over and puts his hand gently on her leg, needing to touch her and urging her to continue. "Thank you for saving my ass once again."

Scully just nods in acknowledgement. They have both saved each other so many times that more words aren't necessary. "I'm just glad I could," is all she says.

"Yeah, me too," he chuckles. "I had no doubt you could and would. When I saw you, all three of you, I knew you would save me."

Scully looked down at the strong, large hand laying on her leg, tears once again blinding her vision. She contemplates the strength and tenderness those hands have shown over the years. A strength that almost disappeared. A tenderness she has never felt, not how she wants to. "I wasn't so sure, Mulder," she admits brokenly.

The remote is dropped to the bed and forgotten as Mulder rolls over puts his other hand under her chin. He tilts her head up to look at him. "I knew. I had no doubts. I'm sorry you had to go through this."

"I...", she begins and stops. She was about to say she almost lost him, but she hasn't really had him. So much distance has always lay between them. The moments of closeness few and far between. She has never been certain why. "I killed someone. I took a life," she says instead.

Mulder understands. She's an FBI agent, but above that she's a doctor. Even the fact that she's a pathologist doesn't change her dedication to save human life, or find justice against those who have taken it. Right then he's not sure if she's ever taken a life before in the line of duty, all he can think about is tonight though the pounding in his head. And tonight he may be the injured one, but she needs the comfort. For once she might even accept it.

He reached over and pulled her unresisting body against his. "I know and I'm sorry and grateful." He begins to rub her back as the sobs she endured earlier return. "Oh Scully," he says mournfully, feeling the pain his partner is going through, but glad for once to be able to carry some of it for her.

After a while her sobs slow and stop and still she lays in his arms. She feels weak and sorry that the poor man with a head injury had to endure her bawling. She tries to leave his arms, believing him to be asleep, when she feels them tighten around her.

"Just a little longer," he asks as he again begins to caress her back. "Share this with me for just a little longer."

How can she say no tonight? It's all she wants too. She's always felt safe in his arms, the few times she has allowed the intimacy. Touching between them was rare and only during those times when it was needed most. 'Guess this qualifies,' she thought as she relaxed against him again.

Then she notices that they are no longer propped on the headboard. Instead, they are lying prone on the bed. In the dark. In each other's arms.

And they fall asleep safe in each other's embrace.

END

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